

Neither ‘Worship’ nor ‘Biblical’: A Response to Alastair Campbell

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In my previous article, *Is ‘Worship’ Biblical?*,¹ I attempted to show that our current understanding of the term ‘worship’ deviates considerably from the meaning of the terms this word translates in the Old and New Testaments. My article began with a study of how the English use of ‘worship’ has developed from a general term for ‘honour’ into a specialized term for practices focused on the religious cultus. It then looked at the principal Hebrew and Greek words translated by ‘worship’ in the Bible and showed that these shared the early English connotation of ‘honour or respect’ and denoted the physical action of bowing or prostration as a sign of this. Alongside the ‘worship’ of God or idols, however, the Bible also refers to their ‘service’ (cf Ex 20:5a), and my article next examined how the terminology of service was applied in Old and New Testaments to the whole of life, including the cultus, lived under the rule of the God who is honoured by the believer. From this, I argued that the key biblical term to understanding the dynamic of the believer’s life is not actually *worship* but *service*, which covers the total lifestyle originating from initial belief. This pattern, clearly established in the Old Testament, continues into the New with the exception that the earthly cultus, being fulfilled in Christ, falls away. The result is that the Apostolic writings direct the believing community to focus on service in daily life, whilst paying little attention to ‘worship’ as it is commonly understood today. In a final comparison with modern attitudes I therefore argued that our current notion of ‘worship’ is not biblical, and indeed has taken on a meaning and a momentum of its own which threaten to distort our entire understanding and practice of the Christian life.

This article produced some positive responses in personal correspondence, but also a reply from Alastair Campbell² which sought to refute my conclusions. Unfortunately, whilst Campbell’s desire to defend our current understanding of ‘worship’ is understandable, I feel that his

1 *Churchman* vol 109/3 1995 pp 197-218. Further references to this article are abbreviated to IWB.

2 A Campbell ‘Once More: Is Worship “Biblical”?’ *Churchman* vol 110/2 1996 pp 131-9. Further references to this article are abbreviated to OM.

article neither does entire justice to my own, nor presents quite as sound a case as he evidently thinks.

Campbell criticizes particularly the methodology of my article, arguing that it is 'in danger of confusing word and concept'³ and rejecting my limitation of worship terminology as an example of 'illegitimate totality transfer'.⁴ Claiming (wrongly) that I suggest 'prayer and praise are not worship because they are not offered to God',⁵ Campbell points to what he sees as biblical and later examples of such 'offerings' as evidence of 'worship' taking place.⁶ From there, he goes on to present his own view that 'worship' has 'at least two distinct meanings ... both of which are witnessed to by the New Testament'.⁷ One he identifies as 'the total response of a person to God', the other is the 'cultic, ceremonial or congregational activity' which happens 'when people gather for a religious purpose'.⁸ Campbell finds four examples of the latter activity in the New Testament community: singing hymns, offering prayer, instructing one another by preaching and teaching, and baptizing believers and breaking bread together.⁹ Since these include 'Godward activity',¹⁰ Campbell concludes that 'the early Christians did indeed meet for worship ... so that we may say that the early Christians worshipped God not only with their lives but also with their lips'.¹¹

Campbell thus presents what might be called the 'common sense case': if we forget the arguments about linguistic technicalities, the fact is that 'worship' activities parallel to our own understanding of the term can be found in the Old and New Testaments. Therefore worship *is* biblical.

However, the conclusion is premature, since the presumption that 'worship' means what is ordinarily meant by the term in modern English and contemporary theology is essential to Campbell's critique. When Campbell dismisses my analysis of the biblical material for failing to distinguish the *concept* of worship from the words used to express it,¹² he argues instead that 'a study of the concept must go much wider than a study of the use of certain words'.¹³ I would entirely agree. However, the study of a concept must surely *include* a study of the words used to express

3 OM p 133

4 OM p 133, following James Barr

5 OM p 134. I do indeed suggest they are not worship – but not on these grounds.

6 OM pp 134-6

7 OM p 137

8 OM p 137

9 OM p 138

10 OM p 139

11 OM p 139

12 OM p 133

13 OM p 133

it, and if such a study reveals a radical difference between the assumptions behind the apparent use of the same words we must begin to revise our thinking accordingly. In this respect, I feel my own approach simply reflects the linguistic questions concerning the church's understanding of justification, outlined by Alister McGrath in his *Iustitia Dei*.¹⁴ McGrath prefaces his analysis thus:

Modern theological vocabularies contain a host of Hebrew, Greek and Latin words, most of which possess, in their original contexts, a richness and depth of meaning which cannot possibly be conveyed by the mere translation of the word into English. [...] It is therefore evident that ... the transference of concepts from their original context may result in a *shift in meaning with unacceptable theological consequences*.¹⁵

McGrath identifies how the Hebrew word for righteousness (*šēdāqâ*) denoted in its biblical context 'a right relationship and the mutual behaviour corresponding to it'. Within the covenant framework, this meant that 'righteousness' implied, *inter alia*, God's *saving* activity on behalf of Israel. The corresponding verb (*hašdîq*) thus carried the primary sense 'to vindicate', 'to acquit' or 'to declare to be in the right'. The difficulty came when these terms were translated first into Greek, then into Latin. *šēdāqâ* made the transition quite happily via *dikaïosunē* to *iustitia*, retaining its soteriological connotations. *Hašdîq*, on the other hand, was translated first as *dikaïoun*, then *iustificare*. The biblical (LXX) use of *dikaïoun*, reflecting *hašdîq*, had the sense of 'considering or estimating as righteous'.¹⁶ However, under the influence of Augustine of Hippo, *iustificare* was taken to mean being *considered* as righteous because one actually *was* righteous. McGrath concludes:

The initial transference of a Hebrew concept to a Greek, and subsequently to a Latin, context point to a *fundamental alteration* in the concepts of 'justification' and 'righteousness' as the gospel spread from its Palestinian source to the western world.¹⁷

Here, then, is a clear example of how a translation without sufficient

14 Cambridge: CUP 1986 pp 4-16. Further references to this book are abbreviated to ID.

15 ID pp 5-6 emphasis added

16 In this it differed from the classical meaning of 'doing justice to' in the sense of punishing.

17 ID p 15 emphasis added. McGrath further comments that: 'As we begin our study of the development of the Christian doctrine of justification, it is necessary to observe that the early theologians of the western church were dependent upon Latin versions of the Bible, and approached their texts and their subject with a set of presuppositions which owed more to the Latin language and culture than to Christianity itself' (p 15). My first article argued that no more and no less is happening in the case of our theology of 'worship'.

regard to prior meaning can introduce an unrecognized theological confusion. And as McGrath goes on to show, the recovery of the *biblical* sense of 'justification', in contrast to the generally accepted but distorted sense, was essential to a proper understanding of the gospel. I would argue that my original discussion, whilst more modest in scope, was based on exactly the same principles.

Campbell himself admits that 'our answer to the question whether worship is biblical will depend on what we mean by worship'.¹⁸ However, his appeal to Barr's work in dismissing my etymological approach to this issue is premature. McGrath comments that 'Barr neglects... to point out that etymological considerations *can* give an indication of the *early* meaning of a term, despite the connotations it may develop later as a consequence of constant use'.¹⁹ This being so, it was legitimate for me to base my arguments on the original meaning of the Hebrew and Greek terms translated 'worship', provided it could be shown that this meaning still applied in the biblical era. And in fact it seems to me irrefutable (certainly Campbell makes little attempt to refute it) that *hišṭ'wā* and *proskunein* not merely derive from but actually *have* precisely the meaning I attributed to them, of 'the physical action or posture [of bowing] prompted by the mental attitude of honour or respect'.²⁰ Moreover, this is not a meaning derived by reading early etymology into present (biblical) usage. Rather, it is the plain and literal meaning clearly maintained throughout the Bible in general and the Old Testament in particular.²¹ Furthermore, this practice is not derived from or narrowed to usage in the 'religious' sphere but is simply a general social convention in both cultic *and* social use throughout the Bible to express the homage of a lesser due to a greater.²²

The recognition that this 'bowing down' is a general social convention rather than a specifically religious act is of considerable significance when we examine its use in the cultic context. Campbell (no doubt in common with many others) wants to move from a narrow focus on 'actual occurrences of the word "worship"' to a wider consideration of material such as is contained in the Psalms or Chronicles.²³ However, it is a passage

18 OM p 137

19 ID p 7

20 IWB p 202

21 The first appearance of *hišṭ'wā* is as a social convention where Abraham bows to his (as yet unrecognized) guests at the oaks of Mamre (Gen 18:2). In the time of Esther, the same term is still being used to describe the honour Haman expects from Mordecai (Esth 3:5).

22 Campbell misreads me when he implies that I restrict the meaning of the physical action to 'acknowledging a relationship with God' (OM p 131). What I actually say is that the action acknowledges the *nature* of the relationship with God (IWB p 201), which is one of the inferior to the superior. The action is thus replete with meaning *about* the relationship as well as indicative of its existence.

23 OM p 133

in Chronicles which sharply illustrates the difference between modern assumptions about ‘worship’ and the biblical use of the term this translates. In the Authorized Version, 1 Chronicles 29:20 reads as follows:

And David said to all the congregation, Now bless the LORD your God. And all the congregation blessed the LORD God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads, and worshipped the LORD, and the king.

Here, we see that both God *and* the king are objects of ‘worship’. Nevertheless, provided we understand ‘worshipped’ to mean ‘honoured as greater by a posture of homage’ there are no problems with this passage. The Revised Standard Version, however, modifies it thus:

Then David said to all the assembly, ‘Bless the LORD your God.’ And all the assembly blessed the LORD, the God of their fathers, and bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD, *and did obeisance to the king* [emphasis added].

What prompts the insertion of ‘obeisance’ with reference to the king is clearly the change of the English meaning of ‘worship’ which occurs between the production of the AV and the RSV – a change which of course illustrates the greater closeness to the Hebrew of early English usage compared with modern English. In the passage quoted, sacrifices are then offered to the LORD, not to the king, but it is essential to note that both God and the king have been *worshipped* in the biblical sense of the word. The difficulty this causes for Campbell, as for the translators of the RSV, is that what *he* means by ‘worship’ simply does not fit either the biblical vocabulary *or* practice at this stage. Yet any understanding of ‘worship’ terminology which does not accommodate this passage as it stands is surely inadequate.

We see this problem further in Campbell’s delineation of what he terms ‘worship^L’ and ‘worship^C’. The former he defines as being expressed by ‘acknowledging God to be God, trusting, loving and obeying him’.²⁴ The latter is expressed by congregational singing and praying, preaching and teaching, baptizing and participation in the Lord’s Supper. Unfortunately, what both these definitions omit is the one thing we know the actual ‘worship’ terms of the Bible almost invariably implied, namely physical bowing or prostration in homage. Whilst it may be arguable that the first Christians took a different approach overall than that which I am suggesting, there is surely something wrong with a biblical analysis of ‘worship’ which fails to include the one thing it clearly entails in the Bible.

This weakness of Campbell's analysis arises, I suspect, from a fundamental flaw in his own methodology. His claim is that:

...we cannot hope to write a theology of worship ... by studying particular words and drawing inferences from them. It is much better to start from the other end, with an agreed definition of worship in our language, and ask what is said of this in the Bible.²⁵

Unfortunately, this is precisely what we must *not* do where the Bible clearly employs certain terms in ways which, upon close examination, challenge the assumptions which are embodied in our own language.²⁶ The difficulty for Campbell is that he remains wedded to uncritical assumptions about 'worship', based on modern usage, which he reads into certain biblical passages. Specifically, he assumes that the essence of 'worship' is prayer and praise (particularly in a congregational context) which are in some sense 'offered' to God²⁷ to 'express a response of love and trust to God's goodness'²⁸ which leads to 'an encounter with God by his Spirit'.²⁹

There is, moreover, simply no evidence in the New Testament of the Apostles directing the Christian community towards, or even being particularly interested in, that dynamic of the Christian life which Campbell's understanding of 'worship' presumes.³⁰ Meanwhile, what Campbell subsumes under 'worship'^L, the Apostles address under the heading of 'service', as I pointed out in my original article.

Ultimately, neither I nor anyone else would dispute Campbell's claim

25 OM p 134

26 Indeed, David Peterson, whom Campbell quotes with approval at this point, actually says that: 'If a definition of worship is to be attempted, it *cannot* simply be based on the derivation or common application of the English word "worship"' (*Engaging with God* [Leicester: IVP 1992] p 17 emphasis added).

27 OM pp 134-6, 139

28 OM p 136

29 OM p 137. Even Campbell's use of the language of 'offering' is, however, contentious. A preliminary survey of both Old and New Testaments suggests that the language of 'offering' (which implies the option of refusal cf Genesis 4:3-5) seems to be almost entirely associated with physical sacrifices and almost never with prayer or praise. An apparent OT exception is Psalm 50:23, but significantly it is a contrast between acceptable thanksgiving and physical sacrifices rendered unacceptable by wickedness (cf vv16-21). Hebrews 5:7 is a NT exception, but is set firmly within a discussion of Jesus' priestly 'offering' (5:1,3; 7:27 etc). These examples clearly do not set a precedent for applying this language wholesale to our own prayers or praises. The prevailing biblical attitude to prayer is one of the confidence expressed in Deuteronomy 4:7: 'For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?'

30 Hence Campbell's admission that 'If we ask what the New Testament has to say about "worship"^C the question is harder to answer' (OM p 138).

that 'worship', as he defines it in terms of congregational prayer and praise, took place in the New Testament community. However, Campbell has overlooked the radical difference between these activities, which in any case the Bible does not explicitly call 'worship', and the modern semantic range and theological function ascribed to Campbell's 'worship'^C. Campbell has set out to prove what we all accept – that the first Christians gathered for meetings which included prayer and praise. But he has not proved enough, if he wishes to argue that 'worship' as it is now used '*in our language*'³¹ is biblical. 'Language' in this sense must include what De Saussure called the *structural* position of the term 'worship' within the overall social context. In this sense, Campbell is right when he asserts that 'worship' now means what we mean by worship. But, by the same token, he is wrong when he suggests that 'worship' means what it means in the Bible.

Part of the problem with Campbell's response is, I believe, a failure to engage fully with modern thinking on worship, and hence similarly to engage fully with my own article. I am not questioning whether Christians did or should 'worship' if, by this, we simply mean 'pray to and praise God' either alone or together.³² The difficulty remains, however, that this is *not* what 'worship' means, either in the Bible or 'in our language'. What I am questioning is whether the modern view of worship is correct and, in consequence, whether the Christian life is 'worship driven', as is commonly alleged. To understand what is meant by this, we must look again at contemporary thinking on 'worship'.

When Tony Higon writes that evangelism is the Church's priority 'second to worship'³³ it is clear that he sees 'worship' as the priority of the believer's life. It is also clear that 'worship' for him is *not* a matter of 'trusting, loving and obeying God' in the whole of life (Campbell's 'worship^L'),³⁴ since otherwise his statement would be tautologous. Instead, Higon unconsciously reveals what is widely presumed – that 'worship', as *distinct from* the service of God in other ways, is the heart and goal of our relationship with God.

This widespread understanding (and the practices stemming from it) are, however, in fundamental disagreement with what the first Christians apparently believed and what they aimed at in their congregational meetings. This is illustrated further by the position of Graham Kendrick, whom most would recognize as a leading figure in the development of the modern practice and understanding of 'worship'. In his book simply

31 OM p 134 my emphasis

32 Cf IWB pp 216-217.

33 Quoted in *New Christian Herald* 24 August 1996 p 6 emphasis added

34 OM p 137

entitled *Worship*,³⁵ Kendrick initially defines 'worship' as 'God's enjoyment of us and our enjoyment of him'.³⁶ This definition is developed as 'worship' is subsequently identified with 'praising and enjoying God',³⁷ 'looking with unveiled face into the Lord's face',³⁸ 'an encounter with the living, caring, suffering Christ',³⁹ 'a celebration or affirmation of the kingdom of God',⁴⁰ 'an encounter with a Person who feels, knows, speaks and reveals himself among us as we worship',⁴¹ and so on.

At the same time, Kendrick gives a nod (as do most writers on this subject) towards the biblical notion that God requires more from his people than the congregational praise and enjoyment of himself. Indeed, Kendrick says that for Jesus 'his whole life was an act of worship, including the most mundane and basic elements of being a human being'.⁴² From this, we might hope that Kendrick would apply his study of 'worship' to every aspect of life. However, it soon becomes clear that for the rest of us, in unacknowledged contrast to Jesus, 'worship' finds its ultimate expression in activities of a very particular kind quite distinct from 'the mundane and basic elements of being a human being'. In the rest of his book, Kendrick offers no more precise definition of 'worship' than those mentioned earlier. However, it is evident as his argument progresses that *our* 'worship' is linked to praise in general and sung praise in particular.⁴³ Yet 'worship' is seen as much more than simply 'praise'. Taking Kendrick's work as a whole, we may conclude that for him 'worship' is that condition, approached via congregational praise (in which music plays a key part), where we enter into 'an experience of God's living presence'⁴⁴ in which we give particular pleasure to God, and which results in him working on us for our transformation.

Kendrick's expectation is clearly that, for the *followers* of Jesus, this 'worship' takes place in withdrawal from daily life to a place of spiritual encounter:

When [at the climax of 'worship'] we enter into the awesome

35 Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications 1984/95. Further references to this book are abbreviated to W.

36 W p 22

37 W p 34

38 W p 35

39 W p 39

40 W p 43

41 W p 56

42 W p 29. Readers of my earlier article will recognize that in this respect Jesus' life might better be described as 'an act of service'. This seems to be reflected in the Bible's reference to the ideal *Servant* of the LORD, rather than his 'Worshipper'.

43 See especially W pp 16-17 where the use of 'praise' gives way to 'praise and worship' and finally to 'worship' alone.

44 W p 144

presence of God, his finished work can take over in our lives, and we can go out again into the world knowing afresh where the power with which he builds his kingdom comes from. Not only that but in his presence we will be *empowered* to serve him, having ‘tapped into’ the source of all power.⁴⁵

Richard Foster (whom Kendrick quotes with approval) takes a similar view of the climactic nature of ‘worship’:

To worship is to experience reality, to touch Life. It is to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community. It is a breaking into the Shekinah of God, or better yet, being invaded by the Shekinah of God.⁴⁶

According to Foster, ‘we have not worshipped the Lord until Spirit touches spirit’.⁴⁷ Indeed:

Until God touches and frees our spirit we cannot enter this realm. Singing, praying, praising may all lead to worship, but worship is more than any of them. Our spirit must be ignited by divine fire.⁴⁸

Two observations can be made at this point. The first is that there is no biblical mandate for, or directives to guide us into, the experience Foster describes. The suggestions he himself gives for attaining this condition of ‘worship’ are drawn from later Christian writers or are his own. Second, the experience of true ‘worship’ has become fundamentally elusive. We may sing, pray and praise fit to burst, but ‘worship’ may simply not happen that day – or any other. Contrary to what Campbell suggests, the words of prayer and praise are, according to this understanding, not ‘performative utterances’ which ‘enact what they describe’,⁴⁹ but truly (as I suggested) tentative hopes. In Foster’s theology, ‘I really want to worship you, my Lord’ expresses a hope which may *never* be achieved.⁵⁰

45 W p 150. In the preceding paragraph, Kendrick describes this condition as ‘entering the “inner sanctuary”’ which is the place of ‘rest’ where ‘all our strugglings and strivings can and must cease’, in support of which he quotes Hebrews 4:10: ‘for anyone who enters God’s rest must also rest from his own work’ (p 149). The omission of the rest of the verse, ‘as God did from his’, suggests an arbitrary use of the text and a superficial grasp of biblical theology at this point.

46 R J Foster *Celebration of Discipline* (London: Hodder and Stoughton 1984) p 138. Further references to this book are abbreviated to CD.

47 CD p 138

48 CD p 139

49 OM p 136

50 IWB p 213: ‘To sing “I really want to worship you, my Lord” ...expresses not only a desire but an inadequacy and ultimately a hopelessness, for in these terms we can never be sure that God has “really” been worshipped.’

Of course, Campbell may at this point disagree with Foster – indeed I hope he does. But it must also be recognized that both Kendrick and Foster represent a substantial (indeed dominant) strand of contemporary thinking on 'worship'. My assertion remains that this is not biblical. Instead, it leads to a mysticism which easily spills over into a degraded picture of God and a falsely elevated picture of the 'worshipper'.

The results can be distasteful as well as confused. Chris Bowater, writing of the effects 'worship' is alleged to bring about, says that, whilst Paul and Silas sang praises to God in prison, 'The prison chains and gates could not withstand the shaking as God began to get excited by the song!'⁵¹ This view of the effect of human singing on the deity is, to my mind, not far short of that assumed by the prophets of Baal in their contest with Elijah (1 Kings 18:26-9). Kendrick comes dangerously close to the same sentiments in his own book when he says that 'worship is first and foremost for [God's] benefit not ours' and results in our 'giving him pleasure'.⁵² He continues: 'It comes as a startling revelation to many of us that we are able to give God pleasure' and quotes in support Psalm 149:4: 'For the Lord takes pleasure in his people.' However, Kendrick overlooks the *active* nature of God's 'taking pleasure' at this point. The sense is of God being 'pleased to accept', rather than 'pleased by' his people, for the emphasis is on his grace towards them, not on their goodness towards him. This is not to deny that when God is 'pleased' it is different from, and better than, when he is 'grieved'. But it is to sound a note of caution over language which implies that God is passively subject to our influence.⁵³

Normally, the modern concept of worship is less offensive but it is just as dangerous in that it systematizes our encounter with God in unbiblical ways. Thus, in a chapter on 'Leading Worship', Kendrick answers the question 'where are we leading people?' by the assertion that 'we can

51 C Bowater *The Believer's Guide to Worship* (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications 1986/93) p 25

52 W p 22

53 Calvin's comment is surely apposite at this point: '... believers are, after their call, approved of God also in respect of works (cf 1 Pet 2:5). For the Lord cannot fail to love and embrace the good things that he works in them through his Spirit. But we must always remember that God "accepts" believers by reason of works only because he is their source and graciously, by way of adding to his liberality, deigns also to show "acceptance" toward the good works he has himself bestowed. For whence come their good works, save that the Lord, having chosen them as vessels unto honour (Rom 9:21), thus is pleased to adorn them with purity? [...] To sum up, by this passage he means nothing else but that God's children are pleasing and lovable to him, since he sees in them the marks and features of his own countenance. [...] Since, therefore, wherever God contemplates his own face, he both rightly loves it and holds it in honour, it is said with good reason that the lives of believers, framed to holiness and righteousness, are pleasing to him' (*Institutes* III.XVII.5). Perhaps at this point the hostility of the Ichthus Fellowships (Kendrick's spiritual home) to Calvin's theology militates against them seeing what Calvin has understood.

expect to be led into the holy of holies and into an experience of God's living presence right in the centre of our meeting together'.⁵⁴ That experience is essentially numinous and non-verbal:

Now we approach our destination, through the torn veil, the way opened up to us by Christ's broken body on the cross. After the noise of joyful singing, thanksgiving and praise, we begin to sense the majesty of God and our activity quietens down to be replaced by reverence and awe. Having been 'doing' in the courts of praise, here our 'doing' turns to 'being', our action turns to stillness. In the holy of holies we find that we can do little but wonder at, and try to take in, the picture we see of God's grace.⁵⁵

At this point, Kendrick's spirituality is distinctly synergistic – Christ's 'doing' on the cross, which opens up the way, is augmented by our 'doing' which brings us from the courts of praise to the holy of holies. Yet this is in distinct contrast with the passage from Hebrews to which he refers, where the 'doing' is *Christ's* alone, and our response is bold entry into the holy place (Heb 10:19) through holding fast in faith to the gospel, 'the confession of our hope' (Heb 10:23).

Moreover, according to Kendrick, when we arrive at our destination the emphasis is on the spiritual *vision* rather than the verbal *message*. This again is in contrast with Hebrews which uses Mount Sinai as the paradigm for the Christian 'encounter' with God (12:18-29). And we must remember that, in recounting that occasion to the Israelites, Moses emphasizes the verbal nature of the encounter as opposed to the visual: 'Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire; you *heard the sound of words*, but *saw no form*; there was *only a voice*' (Deut 4:12 emphasis added). By contrast, in modern 'worship' theology, the word of God, whilst useful, has moved from centre stage in the encounter to being, at best, the trigger to the encounter. Thus although Foster takes seriously the study of the Bible,⁵⁶ for him preaching inspired by the Spirit 'breathes life into worship' and 'enflames [sic] the spirit of worship'.⁵⁷ There is no expectation in his, or in similar writings, that hearing and understanding God's word might be the highest and most profitable encounter the earthly church can have with him.

All this supports the conclusion expressed in my original article that 'the contemporary understanding of "worship" is moving us from a biblical understanding of our relationship with God'.⁵⁸ The final effect is

54 W p 144

55 W p 147

56 CD pp 59-62

57 CD p 144

58 IWB p 211

to direct Christians not into the life of service for which God calls, but into mysticism which eventually takes us further away from him. Campbell, in my opinion, has not sufficiently addressed this point, nor has he actually refuted my supporting biblical material. It may well be that he would personally reject the overall position of some of the writers I have quoted. However, he must then distinguish 'worship as simply God-directed congregational activity' from 'worship in the full sense of the modern term', thus bringing him closer to my own position.

In conclusion, however, it is helpful to sound a warning concerning the dangers of an opposite extremism. It was salutary for me to be reminded of the incident where the praises of the gathered congregation in Acts 4 are accompanied by an experience of God which is more than cognitive or exhortative:

When [Peter and John] were released they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God [in the words of Psalm 2 and a prayer for boldness and the continuation of God's work]. And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:23-31)

It would be a serious error to insist that God can manifest *only* certain things to his people and not others. Nevertheless, whatever the nature of the manifestation here, three fundamental points must be noted. First, Luke does not call what the church does at this point 'worship' because, in his vocabulary, that is simply the wrong word. Second, Luke does not imply that the particular manifestation God gives on this occasion is a *necessary* consequence of what his people have done. Third, he does not build from this a 'theology of the worship-encounter' as would have happened today.

What Luke gives here is one of several instances in Acts which are clearly significant, but not necessarily repeatable (in fact, this one does not recur). Moreover, the final outcome of the incident is not an encounter with God in the 'shaking' of the house, but a fresh filling with God's Spirit to speak his word with boldness, which is the means by which their prayer is answered. Luke describes what happened, but he does not extrapolate to a desire for a 'repeat performance'. And the reason for this would seem to be that in Luke's overall theology the progress of the church is evaluated not in terms of 'worship encounters' but the spread of the gospel. The great coda which punctuates Acts is that 'the word of God increased' or 'multiplied' (6:7; 12:24). Ultimately, it is in relation to his word that God manifests himself (when he so chooses) and through his word that he is

encountered.⁵⁹

The New Testament meetings of Christians in Acts and beyond certainly *included* those elements which Campbell wishes to call ‘worship’, but they were not thereby, in the modern sense, ‘worship meetings’. If they were, we should surely find Acts and the Epistles giving them a far different treatment and greater priority. The evidence is rather that their chief motivation was the sharing of a common life in Christ and their chief purpose was to serve God in serving one another. Interestingly, Kendrick actually makes this comment in the early part of his book:

It would be quite correct to announce in a meeting ‘Let’s praise the Lord’ and then proceed to minister to one another’s needs without a note being sung.⁶⁰

Unfortunately, much of what he subsequently says overturns this insight. But at this point it seems to me he is entirely on track. In a meeting of Christians where all the time was given over to the service of one another, God would have been no less served than in meetings where no human needs were attended to and all the time was given to his praise. This is not to deny the appropriateness of our praises, but simply to highlight the response to God for which he truly seeks, for ‘Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world’ (Jas 1:27).

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59 Campbell denies that Luke shares my ‘distaste’ for worship as he himself understands it (OM p 132). However, in *Engaging with God* (Leicester: IVP 1992), Peterson notes that Luke’s only use of ‘worship’ in relation to Jesus in Acts is in the context of the ascension narrative. He continues: ‘Luke did not go on to employ *proskunein* in Acts to describe either initial acts of homage and devotion to Christ or the content and purpose of regular Christian gatherings’ (p 148). Instead, he ‘restricted the term to a quite technical usage, applying it to those engaged on a pilgrimage to honour God in the traditional temple services ... or to the practice of idolatry’ (p 148). Thus, if Luke indeed did not share my distaste, neither does it seem he shared Campbell’s enthusiasm. Instead, he reflects the theology of the Old Testament (where ‘worship’ is specifically an act of homage towards God which, if it has an earthly locus, is focused in the Temple) and the experience of the New Testament (where the Temple cultus gradually falls away in deference to a new community of believers with new ways of expressing their life in God).

60 W p 52